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J. J. BOISSIEU.

WHEN JEAN JACQUES DE BOISSIEU was born at Lyons, in 1736, affectation and conventional laws predominated in the fine arts as they did in the higher classes of society. It was the epoch of paint and powder, of hoop-petticoats and beauty-spots. Watteau had been dead for fifteen years; Pater, his disciple, died in 1736; but Lancret, his other pupil, still continued to produce lackadaisical coquettes; and Boucher soon after rendered fashionable a *genre* which was as fatal to art as it was to morality; while Dorat, Bernis, Colardeau, Bernard, and the Chevalier de Parry, soon became followers, in poetry, of the same school. All elevation of mind seemed to have disappeared. The age of Louis XIV. had seen the study of nature neglected for the imitation of the ancients; and the eighteenth century substituted the caprices of the imagination, and the fancies of civilised corruption, for the study of the ancients. Whenever man once wanders from the truth, he always plunges, by necessary and unavoidable progression, deeper and deeper into error. But yet, whatever ascendancy the evil may gain, it never succeeds in corrupting all the citizens of a state. A secluded life protects some from its pernicious influence; mental vigour, originality in ideas, and force of character guard others; while a few owe their safety to the artless sincerity with which they follow their inclinations, and allow themselves to be guided by their own inspirations. It is among the last that Boissieu must be ranked. He belonged to an old and noble family which came from Auvergne. His paternal grandfather, Jean de Boissieu, had been secretary to Marguerite de Valois, and was appointed her executor when she bequeathed her property to Louis XIII. Boissieu evinced great aptitude for his calling at a very early age. We are told by one of his biographers, that "Monsieur Vialis, his maternal uncle, possessed some very fine pictures, which Boissieu used to attempt to copy, even before he had received any lessons in drawing; and these first trials of the young artist announced his innate talent."

Boissieu's decided predilection for the fine arts was a source of great annoyance to his parents, who wanted to make a magistrate of him. They placed him, however, with a painter of the name of Lombard, who soon taught him all he knew, that is, very little. Boissieu required a more talented master; but Frontier, with whom he was now placed, was, like Lombard, soon surpassed by his pupil. Boissieu was, therefore, obliged to apply to the princes of the pencil for the instruction of which he stood in need. The works of Ruysdael, of Berghem, of John Miel, and of the brothers Both, henceforth became his preceptors. His imitations met with great success; and a drawing executed by the young artist after a picture by Wouvermans, having been sold at a sale for a thousand crowns, his parents began to waver in their obstinacy. Besides which, as Boissieu led a most exemplary life, and evinced none but the noblest of sentiments, they thought, at last, that he could be trusted to his own guidance. He consequently set out for Paris, where he had long wished to go, in order to improve himself. He was now in his twenty-fourth year.

Though it would not have been astonishing for Boissieu, now that he was in the capital, to be led astray by the paltry style and false taste of the reigning school, yet such was not the case. Rich enough not to be obliged to sell his works, and too modest to court public approbation, he neither troubled himself about fashion nor success, but pursued his profession for the love he bore it, for the sake of exercising his imagination, of satisfying a moral want, and of procuring himself intellectual amusement. He did not even require to be put on his guard against the false theories or the licentious and affected style of the epoch. Without attempting to emulate them, he studied those masters who pleased him, took advice of nature, and followed the dictates of his own sentiments. But it was wholly because his style differed from the one which was in fashion, that his paintings were so quickly noticed. Connoisseurs appreciated their merit, opened their

galleries to him, and permitted him to copy whatever he chose. Monsieur Tolosan, who came from the same place as himself, was among his admirers; and the most celebrated artists of the day were not less eager to do homage to his talent. Vernet, Soufflet, Watelet, and Greuze sought his friendship, and prized the possession of his drawings. No one, however, showed him more affection than the Duke de la Rochefoucault, and it was not long before they formed a most intimate acquaintance with one another. One day, this amiable nobleman made Boissieu the proposal to undertake a journey to Italy. Boissieu willingly accepted the offer, but as the duke could not fix any time for their departure, the artist went on as usual with his studies.

To-day he copied the compositions of the great masters, and to-morrow he wandered into the environs of Paris, to sketch the finest views he met with in them. The forests of Marly, of St. Germain, and of Fontainebleau, became his studios, in which nature provided him with an unlimited number of beautiful models. The surpassing majesty of the old trees, the juvenile grace—if we may be allowed the expression—of the underwood, the capricious forms of the thickets and the briars, the old stones on which arabesques were traced by the moss that grew there, the deep glen-like roads full of wild mint, the perspectives which the fog slightly tinged with blue, the tall avenues, and the hilly land, delighted his mind and employed his pencil alternately. On his return to his native place, he took with him a great number of studies, which afterwards enabled him to enrich his etchings with a thousand valuable details.

It was at this time that he made his first trials in engraving. A picture-dealer brought him one day some copper-plates already prepared, and asked him as a favour to make some drawings on them. Boissieu set to work, and thus accidentally commenced the profession in which he was destined to meet with such unlimited success. These first etchings were, of course, imperfect, but they yet bespoke the great and original talent of the artist.

The Duke de la Rochefoucault having at last found time to set out on his tour through Italy, went to Lyons, in 1765, to fetch Boissieu, and they immediately hastened to cross the Alps. Both of them experienced great pleasure on beholding that celebrated country in which so many *chefs-d'œuvre* are embellished by so soft a light, and where the productions of nature are not less attractive than the works of man. Whenever they met with a view that pleased them, Monsieur de la Rochefoucault stopped the carriage, so that Boissieu might make a sketch of it. Florence, Rome, and Naples were the three cities in which they made the longest stay. The young artist sketched the arch of Titus, the Colosseum, the tomb of Cecilia Metella, the cascades of Tivoli, and the ruined house of Mæcenæ. He formed an acquaintance with Winkelman, who then lived in the palace, and under the protection, of Cardinal Albani. The impassioned admirer of the Greeks and Romans thought he had found a disciple in Boissieu, for the painter listened to his arguments with the greatest attention; and, perhaps, Boissieu himself fancied that he was become a convert to the somewhat exclusive ideas of the archæologist: but, on his return to Lyons, he did not the less continue to imitate the Flemish painters, both in respect to subjects and to colouring.

As Boissieu was determined that want of care should not hinder him from equalling his models, he ground his colours and prepared his varnish himself. But the fatigue attendant on continual application soon proved too much for his weak constitution, and he fell dangerously ill. He was, therefore, obliged to give up painting in oil. From this time, he only worked on wash, lead-pencil, and red chalk drawings, and on etchings, but he executed all these with the greatest talent. "His red chalk portraits," says Monsieur Dugas Montbel, "are finished in a manner which belongs only to him, and which has as yet found no imitators; his lead-pencil land-

scapes also soon attained the greatest celebrity." The Count d'Artois and the first noblemen of the court eagerly sought after all his new productions, and foreigners were not less desirous to obtain them. England, Russia, and northern Germany, neglected nothing in order to procure them. But

sketches he had taken during his journey in Italy, and especially applied himself to engraving. After having obtained his principal effects by means of aqua-fortis, he used to soften his work down, throw harmony into it, and complete it with the dry point and the roulette.



ETCHINGS BY BOISSIEU.

this was somewhat difficult to achieve, for Boissieu did not sell his productions. Monsieur Artaria, of Manheim, who carried on a large trade in objects of art, could only obtain them by purchasing them second-hand, or by presenting the artist with valuable pictures in exchange for his own.

He thus lived without ambition, trouble, or regret, till the time when the French Revolution broke out. The passions of the epoch exercised, however, no influence on his heart. While France was giving birth to a new state of society, and suffering the pangs of maternity, Boissieu fled from the noise of con-



ETCHINGS BY BOISSIEU.

In 1772, when he was twenty-six years of age, he married Mademoiselle Anne Roch de Valoux, a native, like himself, of Lyons. So mild and steady a man as Boissieu was, necessarily made a good husband: his marriage was, therefore, a very happy one, and in no way changed his mode of life. Incessantly occupied with his art, he now made use of the

tention to seek the calm pleasures of solitude. But misfortune overtook him in the country, where he had lived in retirement for twenty years. An artist, who was a member of the Convention, was sent to the banks of the Rhone for the express purpose of protecting his life; but Boissieu lost his fortune; and his eldest son, who was compelled to flee the country after

the siege of Lyons, died in Switzerland from the fatigues of his journey, and doubtless, too, from the grief caused by his exile.

Boissieu earned sufficient by his pencil to supply his wants; and when the nation had recovered itself enough to enjoy the pleasures of the imagination, the Institute of France, the Academies of Bologna, of Florence, of Grenoble, and of Lyons, appointed him one of their corresponding members. But, in spite of the entreaties of M. Denon, he could not be prevailed upon to quit his province for the more brilliant abode of Paris.

scenes with which they are surrounded. His own portrait, too, confirms these indications; *finesse* is there joined to vulgarity; the cheek-bones are prominent, the nose big, the lips thick, the lower part of the forehead fleshy, and the chin large; but the eye is full of observation and shrewdness, though devoid of noble expression. The face, however, wants that dignity which is the characteristic of a superior mind. The personages met with in his works have, perhaps, still less nobleness, and fewer signs of intelligence about them. The monks in the choir; the children blessed by Pius VII., with



PORTRAIT OF BOISSIEU, DRAWN AND ENGRAVED BY HIMSELF.

Old age did not diminish his talent; for his last engraving is one of the finest he ever executed. He died in the possession of all his force of mind, on the 1st of March, 1810, at the age of seventy-four. For some time past, he had with difficulty borne the severity of the winters; and the cold of 1810 penetrated to his very heart.

The works of Boissieu seem completely to reveal his Auvergnian origin; in them you discover patience, and rather a heavy character, but, at the same time, that true love of nature which is imparted to all mountaineers by the beautiful

the woman who has brought them, and the acolytes placed in the background; the fathers of the desert; the little boys playing with a dog; the professor of botany and his pupils; the family before the fire; and several other personages, carefully drawn, surprise you in a disagreeable manner by the common and inert expression of their features. Such lethargic and insignificant-looking faces constitute a defect which will not be found, perhaps, in the works of any other celebrated painter or engraver. This defect spoils the pleasure which the talented and fine execution of the artist pro-

duces. A few heads, on the contrary, possess features of a most lively expression: the two children, for instance, who are looking at a flute-player; those who are amusing themselves by blowing bubbles; the portrait of Boissieu's brother; a three-quarter male figure; and two others in the print where a man is being shaved, surprise you by the boldness of their relief and their animated appearance. Such, too, is the old rogue with a cap nearly reaching down to his shaggy eye-brows, beneath which his suspicious-looking, penetrating, and perfidious eyes assume a formidable expression. Yet these same heads, which are so striking in appearance, and so admirably executed, are void of nobleness and grandeur, and no reflection of a single elevated sentiment is perceptible in them. Observation, *finesse* and cunning, are all that the engraver has been able to represent; and these form, in his eyes, all the phases of moral life. His "St. Jerome in the Desert," for instance, is writing very attentively, but no inspiration is there to light up his look, or to impart any appearance of idealism to his features. The landscape, which is rigidly beautiful, possesses more expression than the face of the saint; and the man is thus rendered inferior to the inanimate objects by which he is surrounded. Boissieu, it is evident, lived too much in solitude and sought too much after calm: it is necessary for the artist, as well as for the poet, that he should himself attentively study the workings of the higher passions, which are to be met with only in the bustle of active life. Goethe himself, in consequence of keeping continually out of society, lost, at last, the vigour of his brilliant days; and finished by writing works almost void of sense, and full of chimerical visions.

Boissieu was more successful with nature than he was with the human face. His landscapes are very fine: in them vigour is joined to delicacy, and elegance to truth. The drawing is always full of energy in the *tout ensemble* and of *finesse* in the details. Here we see the beautiful effects of light and shade bringing out every object in bold relief, while in another place are seen fugitive lights, carefully managed gradations, and backgrounds of the most exquisite lightness. No trace of negligence or of hurry is anywhere to be discovered in them; but everything is, on the contrary, of the most perfect finish. The foliage of the trees, the movement or the motionless splendour of the water, the canals, the forms of the land, the winding or broken lines of the rocks, and the magic of the perspective are all represented in the most successful and varied manner. A few artists have reproached Boissieu with having exaggerated the brilliancy of the light parts of his foliage to such an extent as to produce the effects of snow: this defect, however, can hardly be said to exist except in the bad copies, in which the details of the light parts have disappeared. It must be owned, however, that Boissieu was not always successful in

the execution of his clouds, which might often be taken for mere daubs instead of moving vapours.

But though the works of Boissieu are open to certain criticisms, he himself is none the less on that account the greatest etcher that France ever produced. His drawings are executed in such perfection, that many of them are as valuable as oil paintings, and some of them have even been sold for £120 sterling each. Though they are all characterised by such wonderful delicacy in their execution, Boissieu yet worked very quickly. A skilful draughtsman of his time, having seen him work, was thoroughly astonished at the rapidity with which he completed everything he began; the artist in question did not think it possible for so perfect a finish to be obtained with such promptitude, and was seized with a fit of discouragement, which lasted him a fortnight.

Boissieu also painted some pictures of subjects similar to those painted by Ostade; but he owes all his fame to his etchings, which he executed in so masterly and picturesque a manner. The number of his plates is, according to M. Dugas Montbel, a hundred and seven, which are generally marked D. B., with the date. Monsieur Guichardot, who has studied the works of the celebrated engraver more than any one else, possesses, or is acquainted with, a hundred and forty-two of his prints; and as this gentleman has devoted forty years of his life to the works of Boissieu, his opinion ought to be taken as an authority.

The following are among the engraver's best prints:—

"An Old Man, with a Boy Reading," in the manner of Rembrandt.

"A Cooper working in a Cellar;" after the same.

"An Italian Landscape, with Women washing."

"A Landscape with Shepherds by the water-side;" after Berghem.

"A Forest with a Cottage, and a Man on Horseback, with Peasants."

Another "Forest Scene," the companion to the above.

"A Landscape with Figures and Animals, having in the middle a Hill, on which is a Cross and an Old Man kneeling."

"A View near Zurich, with a Man and a Woman mounted on a Mule, and driving Cattle through a rivulet."

"The Quack Doctor;" after C. du Gardyn.

"A Landscape with Figures in a Boat, and a Mill;" after Ruysdael.

"The Great Mill," a charming landscape; after the same.

"A Mountainous Landscape, with a Waterfall;" after Asselyn.

"A Grand Landscape, with a Hermit at the entrance of a Cavern," 1797.

"A pleasing Landscape with large Figures, and two Cows standing in the water."

BALLOONS AND BALLOONING.

In the advance of mankind, all things, even apparent obstacles, promote incessant progress. Expressions of doubt in every form, the host of sceptical and envious men, favour that improvement which they gainsay; plagiarists extend its influence while they render its effects popular; everything conduces to progress.

The germ of those successive discoveries, which men of genius from age to age disclose, and which each generation develops, existed from the beginning of time. When the veil which covered them is drawn aside by the skilful or fortunate hand of one of real genius, numbers of envious spirits, anxious to darken the rising glory, ransack the dreams of the past, which turn out sometimes to be the foreshadowing of the future. They there seek to prove that the idea which has just arisen is not new, that the progress is illusive. The man whom they lately admired, far, in their opinion, from meriting universal gratitude, has only meanly attributed to himself the merit of another, by bringing to light the

invention buried by an unknown scholar in some old worm-eaten book. These efforts, these struggles to deprive the inventor of his legitimate reward, his glory, may darken and disturb his life, but cannot silence the echo of the divine word, of which the man of genius is but the voice, and, in spite of the envious, the future will recognise the name of such discoverer.

The first balloon darting above the clouds had scarcely imposed silence upon those who, denying the possibility of ascending into and traversing the air, taxed with folly the attempts made for this purpose, than these same people hastened to assert that the discovery was not new. The secret of flying through space was known to the ancients, said they; Icarus, the magician of Thrace; the prophets transported to heaven; Simon, the sorcerer; fable and history, down to Cyrano, of Bergerac, and his ingenious projects for travelling across the moon and the sun, were brought forward and set in opposition to the young aeronauts. These forerunners,